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SB 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force & HB 5551: An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools.

Monday, March 7, 2016

Good afternoon Co-Chairs, Fleischman and Slossberg, Ranking Members, Lavielle and Boucher, and members of the Education Committee. I am Representative Robyn Porter and I represent the 94th Assembly District for New Haven and Hamden. I have with me Dr. Jane Gates, Vice President for Academic Affairs at WCSU and I am here today to give supporting testimony for Senate Bill 379: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, and to offer brief comments on House Bill 5551, An Act Concerning the Commissioner's Network of Schools.

I currently co-chair the Minority Teacher Recruitment task force with Senator Winfield and we were blessed to have a phenomenal group of highly seasoned and dedicated stakeholders on our team, including Rep. McCrory of Hartford's 7th District. Over the months that we met, we heard from organizations, state departments, teachers, superintendents, and national experts on the subject matter of minority teacher recruitment and retention. Unfortunately, CT continues to rank #1 with the widest achievement gaps in the nation with a notable distinction when comparing poverty-stricken students with their affluent peers. In fact, CT's achievement gap between White students and Black and Hispanic students is wider than the nation as a whole in each grade and subject, based on the average scores on the *National Assessment of Education Progress*.

Undoubtedly, there are actions that the state needs to take to address the fact that for the first time in history almost half of the students attending public schools in CT are minorities while 92% of our certified teachers are White and 64% of the state's districts do not have any administrators of color. Not to mention, the CSDE released an update on Minority Teacher Recruitment back on November 5, 2014 which stated in part: "the benefit of minority educators extends well beyond the social domain," and that a quantitative study by Meier, Stewart and England "revealed that school districts with large populations of black teachers had fewer black students placed in special education classes, lower rates of suspension and expulsion for black students, more Black students placed in gifted and talented programs; and higher graduation rates."

Now, while SB 349 does not have the specific recommendations that the task force is working on, I would ask that this committee consider tangible, solid policy proposals, such as, but not limited to the following:

1. Eliminate norm reference testing for PRAXIS and replace it with criterion referenced testing.
2. Praxis exemption for non-teaching professionals (psychologists, social workers, etc.) should be explored. People who are otherwise qualified and certified in their field should be able to apply for a waiver.
3. Nontraditional pathways to licensure should be explored further for paras and career-changers.
4. Increase number of minorities involved in MTR programming and leadership.
5. Create a "MTR Policy and Oversight Committee."
6. Permit out-of-state educators to attain CT certification with certain conditions (inclusive of experience and demonstration of past performance) through teacher reciprocity certification.
7. Require the state to implement the existing alternate route to certification for administrators, superintendents, and early childhood educators.
8. Improve articulation agreements between 2-year and 4-year institutions to create a pipeline for minority teachers.
9. Implement grow your own programs that work with HS students to incentivize teaching.
10. MTR programs should be required to implement Results Based Accountability.

Overall, we must change the current system that is clearly not producing a teaching population that is at all reflective of the actual population of CT's urban centers; specifically cities like Bridgeport, Hamden, Hartford, New Haven, and Waterbury to name a few. Therefore, while I unequivocally support the continuation of the Minority Teacher Recruitment Task Force, we must act now to implement effective policies that will address the deficiencies that are eroding our State Department of Education and fueling our shameful #1 state ranking for largest achievement gap.

Lastly, I would like to offer my support of HB 5551. For far too long, thousands of children, specifically constituents of mine, have attended schools and institutions that have lacked the resources and tools necessary to improve student achievement. Frankly, I have always wondered why we cannot turn all of these schools around. Currently, in my district Lincoln Bassett Community School is making great strides as a turnaround school. However, I do not believe that we as a state are doing everything we can to give schools like Lincoln Bassett the flexibility and autonomy needed to achieve the outcomes we know they can.

This past January, I had the privilege of accompanying Co-Chairman Fleischmann, Commissioner Wendzell, my colleague Rep. McCrory and several legislative policy staffers on a trip to visit Lawrence, Massachusetts. In our visit to Lawrence, we spoke to teachers, administrators, and labor representatives and were able to hear, see, and feel the outstanding results of a true turnaround. Over four years, Lawrence was able to make close to a 20-point gain in their statewide assessments with 88.9% of its population qualifying for free lunch, 70% of the student's having English as their second language, and 91.3% being Hispanic. In short, I support HB 5551 because our neighborhood schools are an integral part of our community and their success, or lack thereof, directly links to the economic development and advancement of our state as a whole.

In closing, I thank you for your time and attention to my testimony and will now turn it over to Dr. Gates and welcome any questions that you may have upon the completion of her testimony.